

# *Mahler on the Couch*

BY ERIC HYNES

WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2012 AT 4 A.M.





**During the late summer of 1910, a distraught Gustav Mahler journeyed to Holland to spend a single afternoon with a vacationing Sigmund Freud, and their onetime encounter serves as the departure point for this eccentric and expressionistic reverie on love, loss, and the birth of modern marriage.** With Freud (Karl Markovics) as his interrogator, the distraught composer (Johannes Silberschneider) tells of an affair between his wife, Alma (Barbara Romaner), and the young architect Walter Gropius (Friedrich Mücke), before more intense analysis uncovers the domestic breakdown that preceded it. Much as David Cronenberg did with *A Dangerous Method*, another art-house psych-out matching a stogie-plugged Freud with a great man in meltdown mode, German filmmakers Percy and Felix Adlon use the boys as bait but hook us with their heroine. As a woman caught between affection and passion, playing the muse and pursuing her own dreams, Romaner exhibits marvelous range, serving as the story's quietly percolating conscience as well as its wild, gregarious, rolling-under-the-piano life force. The film's canted camera angles and overt theatricality can be off-putting, but such stylistic touches effectively evoke Mahler's mind and music and give this dress-up drama a kick of frisky invention. Mahler would die less than a year later, but as the Adlons persuasively posit, not before achieving a kind of psychoanalytic grace.

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